



## PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH OF SEX OFFENDERS IN LITHUANIA: STATE OF THE ART AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

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**Purpose** – Sexual abuse of adults and children has profound long-term consequences, including serious emotional, mental health and interpersonal relationship problems for the victims. Assessment, treatment and management of sex offenders are important in order to reduce sexual violence and relapse of offender. The treatment, parole and sentencing policy should be influenced by both theoretical consideration and the risk that sex offenders pose to society (Schechory, Ben-David, 2005). Sex offenders constitute a heterogeneous group of individuals who begin abusing for a myriad of reasons. One core distinction in the research is between rapists and child molesters (Robertiello, Terry, 2007). The main goal of this presentation is to discuss findings of the study concerning psychosocial risk factors of rapists and child molesters and to outline implications for future research in this field.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The sample of the present study ( $n = 119$ ) was drawn from five correctional institutions. Child molesters ( $n = 39$ ) and rapists ( $n = 18$ ) voluntarily took part in this research. Two risk assessment tools were used in order to determine risk factors: Sexual Violence Risk-20 (SVR-20), (Boer et al., 1997) and Static-99 (Hanson, Thornton, 2000). SVR-20 is one of the widely used structured professional judgement risk assessment tools and Static-99 reliable and valid statistical tool. The studies show good psychometric characteristics and predictive validity of these risk assessment instruments (Rettenberger et al., 2011). A structured questionnaire of psychosocial data was used for the purpose of present study. Statistical analysis was performed in order to compare differences between rapists and child molesters.



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**Findings** – The results of the study showed some differences between the criminal risk factors of rapists and child molesters. Rapists have committed more past violent nonsexual offenses than child molesters. They tend to be more criminally versatile as well as choosing different kinds of victims and cause more physical harm. The results also revealed that rapists are younger than child molesters and have less experience living with a life partner. However, child molesters exhibited more psychosocial adjustment problems, i.e. sexual deviance, victimization in childhood, major mental illness, substance abuse problems and relationship problems. Results of the study showed that sexual offenders against children exhibit a high density of sex offenses and an escalation in the frequency and severity of sex offenses (Mitrauskas, Bandzevičienė, 2013).

**Research limitations/implications** – The present study is cross-sectional study which enable us to compare these two groups of offenders. In order to establish prognostic validity of the sex offenders' risk factors related to criminal recidivism in Lithuanian sex offenders sample, prospective research should be performed.

**Practical implications** – In order to apply appropriate and effective correctional programmes for sex offenders the criminogenic needs should be established. This study made some implications about risk factors in sex offenders which have practical value for professional working with this kind of offenders, i.e. correctional psychologists, parole and probation officers, law enforcement officers.

**Originality/Value** – The present study is one of few studies in Lithuania concerning psychological aspects of sex offending and the first study which compares rapists and child molesters psychosocial risk factors.

**Keywords:** sex offenders, rapists, child molesters, risk factors.

**Research type:** research paper.